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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for the development and improvement of school security programs by local education agencies are provided in this guidebook. Strategies are outlined for managing perimeter and grounds, buildings, visitors, weapons, bomb threats, security systems, and lighting. The recommendation is made for use of a checklist by a local committee to analyze security strengths and weaknesses. The appendix includes a vandalism/security checklist. (LMI)

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VANDALISM PREVENTION AND SCHOOL SECURITY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Introduction

Violence and vandalism in public schools began to creep into the national consciousness in the early 1960s. By the 1980s we were facing a wave of violence in many parts of the United States which has now reached crisis proportions. In 1987, 465,000 violent victimizations occurred in or near schools. Included were 75,900 aggravated assaults of which 67 percent resulted in injury, 36,850 robberies in which 22,610 injuries occurred, and 350,000 simple assaults with 31 percent resulting in injury.

North Carolina has not escaped this phenomenon. Schools from various parts of the state have reported incidents of violence ranging from a student being shot at school to senseless acts of vandalism directed at school buildings.

Adding to these problems are numerous incidents of theft of school property. Schools have become virtual store houses of electronic equipment such as computers, cameras, video tape recorders, televisions and the list goes on. The high value of electronic equipment makes it a tempting target for thieves, professional and amateur. We must protect our schools from these criminals. The majority of criminals who threaten schools come from the larger community and often beyond the local area or state, but very few are found within the school community.

This publication is designed to provide local education agencies with ideas and suggestions for developing and improving existing school security programs. No single recommendation will be the right answer for every situation; consequently, local education agencies are encouraged to adapt ideas that best suit their environment. One final point on security: any security measure, no matter how simple, will cause some inconvenience to some people; that is part of the price of prevention.

Bob Etheridge
State Superintendent
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July 1990

Perimeter and Grounds

In the development of any security program, the starting point should be the perimeter. In areas where vehicular or pedestrian traffic crosses school property unrestricted, potential for criminal activity directed against the school is heightened. In many cases a fence and a gate can restrict access, thus denying criminals or vandals the opportunity to become familiar with the school environment. However, vehicle access should remain unencumbered to facilitate night surveillance and response by fire and police vehicles. School boundaries should be clearly marked and signs should be prominently posted restricting access to school property. Limit free standing signs by painting some of them on the curb or street. Insure that easy access to roofs and upper floors is limited by avoiding placement of trees, dumpsters, covered walks, drain pipes and screen walls where they could be easily climbed to reach those places.

Discourage or prevent through traffic in parking areas. Mix student and faculty parking and limit access to parking areas by students during school hours. A parking area patrol during school hours by a part-time employee (i.e., possibly a retired person) not only will prevent parking lot vandalism, but can curtail students leaving school during the school day. The salary can be paid in part through the collections from parking permits.

Buildings

The next area for concern is the buildings. Administrators, teachers and staff need to be alert to people entering a school building during the school day (the school day runs from the moment the first individual arrives in the morning until the last person leaves at the end of the day). Schools are necessarily designed with many entrances, all of which, need to be unlocked to allow easy access in the morning. However, after the first instructional period begins, all doors with the exception of the main entrance should be locked and used as exits only for the remainder of the day with only necessary exceptions. The school community should be encouraged to notice when doors are blocked open and to close them. Security awareness is everyone's job.

In order to control access to school buildings, signs directing visitors to the main entrance should be prominently displayed on the approach to the school. Ideally, there should be an "information" desk within the main entrance to direct visitors or provide information, but with the primary objective to stop anyone who does not belong at the school from having free run of the building. In primary and elementary schools, the information desk could be handled by parent volunteers; in middle and high schools, either by parent volunteers, by student council, honor students or some recognized reliable group of student leaders.

In designing new schools, avoid doorway niches. In a recent survey on vandalism in North Carolina schools, doorway niches were identified as one of the most common problem areas. Fire/security alarms should be incorporated in the design of new schools. Security systems that are part of the design from its planning phase onward are more effective than those added to existing facilities.

Another area of concern raised in the vandalism survey related to vandalism in toilets. Partitions often are pulled from wall mountings, and plumbing fixtures are damaged frequently. Partitions made of reinforced concrete block and doweled into the floor are virtually vandal proof. Wall hung lavatories should be supported by masonry supports or carriers with support legs. Floor mounted toilets and urinals are more vandal resistant. Avoid lay-in ceiling tiles, if possible, in toilet areas; these provide hiding places for drugs and other contraband and are easily damaged. Ceilings, especially in bathrooms, should be of hard durable material.

Anchor pads and other devices designed to lock audiovisual, computer and electronic equipment are effective measures in discouraging the theft of these items by people from within the school and by intruders. All such items should be permanently marked with identifying information such as the school name and serial numbers. These items should be recorded on property inventory records to enable law enforcement authorities to positively identify them as school property should they be stolen and subsequently recovered.

Visitors

Once the perimeter and access to our buildings have been given attention, the question becomes, how do we recognize people with a legitimate right or need to be in the school? In small elementary and middle schools, personal recognition is normally sufficient. But, how does a teacher whose class is at the farthest point from the school office know that the man in the hall is from maintenance, or is a heating contractor, or someone from the state department doing a survey. The only effective way to accomplish this positive identification, without someone from the office leaving their job to act as an escort, is through an identification card or badge system. To be truly effective, an identification badge should be issued to each adult member of the school community, preferably with a photograph to be worn so that it is visible. With an identification badge system, a visitor who has business in the school and needs to have unescorted access in the building is issued a visitor's badge to be worn so that it is visible while the person is in the building and on school grounds. In a high school, especially a large school, consideration should be given to students being issued identification badges. A person noticed in the school area (buildings or grounds) without an identification badge should be questioned. If a badge is lost or forgotten, either a replacement badge or substitute type badge for the day would be issued. It is important that former students or others who do not have a legitimate reason to be on school property be kept off. Interlopers frequently are the source of drugs and generally cause problems. A badge identification system is a device that can significantly enhance the principals' ability to control their campuses.

Weapons

In the recent past there have been several incidents involving guns and/or knives in North Carolina schools. The problem the school administrator faces is how to preclude these deadly weapons from being brought into the school. One device that has been used with some success in school districts in various parts of the country is a magnetometer (metal detector) to screen students entering the building. This is an effective screening device in the prevention of weapons being brought into a school building; however, there are a number of legal issues which

have not been settled concerning the use of metal detectors in a school setting. The Department of Public Instruction has asked for a formal opinion from the North Carolina Attorney General's Office on this issue and it will be disseminated to all LEAs when received. In the meantime if the use of a metal detector is contemplated, the school district should coordinate its use with the local school board attorney.

A very effective system for combating any type of criminal activity in a school setting is a formal reporting system and community involvement. A program entitled Youth Crime Watch has been operating in south Florida for a number of years. Youth Crime Watch is a network of students who are involved in their schools with the purpose of doing something about crime and vandalism. According to their literature, the "something" that they are asked to do is reduced to a simple request to observe and to report any criminal activity or vandalism anonymously. Youth Crime Watch makes a point that their members are not "narcs"; they are the decent majority of students who are tired of being victims and having crime in their schools. The organization has been active in Dade County since 1980 and has been effective in reducing crime in schools as much as 50 percent. School districts wishing further information concerning Youth Crime Watch may contact Suzanne R. Joseph, 5220 Biscayne Boulevard, Suite 207, Miami, Florida 33137, Telephone (305) 758-5124. Also, school administrators should not be afraid to get police involved when activities which are criminal in nature occur at school. The police can be of great assistance and be a valuable resource in combating vandalism or crime.

Bomb Threats

From time to time frequent telephone hoax bomb threats develop into perplexing problems in some school districts. Although these threats are invariably hoaxes, each must be taken seriously and treated as if it were real. It is important for each school to have an emergency plan on how to deal with a bomb threat when and if it is received. Of course, the paramount issue is safety; buildings should be evacuated in the same way they would be in the event of a fire or fire drill. A bomb threat may be received by various means; usually by telephone. The recipient of a bomb threat call should attempt to obtain as much information from the caller as possible.

There should be a specific checklist for this purpose beside each telephone for quick access to the person answering the phone. The following are suggestions for use in a checklist.

I. **What to do?**

A. Remain calm.
B. Keep the caller on the line as long as possible.
C. Get as much INFORMATION from the caller as possible.
D. Notify the principal immediately.

II. **What INFORMATION should be collected?**

A. Time and date of call.
B. Exact words of the caller.
C. Questions to ask.

1. When is the bomb set to explode?
2. Where is the bomb right now?
3. What kind of bomb is it?
4. What does it look like?
5. Why did you place the bomb?
6. Where are you calling from?

D. Description of the caller's voice.

1. Male or female.
2. Young, middle-aged, old.
3. Accent.
4. Tone of voice.
5. Is the voice familiar? If so, what did it sound like?
6. Other voice characteristics.

E. Background noise.

1. Was there any noise in the background which could identify the location of the caller? (i.e., traffic, music, trains, airplane, etc.)

2. Were there other voices in the background? If so, answer questions under D above pertaining to them.

F. Time the caller hung up.

G. Remarks, name and address of recipient.

Following the call, the recipient of the call should immediately notify the principal. The use of two-way radios or walkie talkies is not recommended because you cannot be sure who is listening and the potential for causing panic is very real in this situation. The principal should immediately notify appropriate police and fire officials. In schools where bomb threats are a regular occurrence, school officials should work with local telephone companies to put a trap on the school line in order to attempt to trace the incoming call. In attempting to learn the identity of a caller, since hoax bomb threats are frequently done by students who are absent from school on the day of the call, an examination of that day's absentee list is a good place to start.

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Security Systems

There are long periods of time when school buildings are closed during which they are particularly vulnerable to vandals or other criminals. Protecting schools during these periods requires thought and planning. There are several approaches that LEAs can take to defend their schools against property destruction in break-ins and theft. One of the most effective defenses and one which will produce the most immediate result is the installation of a security system. A security system starts with the more traditional methods of improving locking mechanisms on doors and windows and replacing windows that are vulnerable to frequent breakage with types of windows that are vandal-resistant. This type of window material ranges from lexan to plexiglass to three-quarter inch laminated glass. Panic hardware on the doors of many schools in North Carolina is antiquated and is consequently a weak link in a security system. In many cases, all that is required to gain access through one of these doors is the simple insertion of a wire such as a coat hanger to trip the panic crash bar. Newer type panic bars offer a significant improvement in security of doors while still meeting code. A fairly common practice of chaining panic bars with padlocks when schools are closed is dangerous for the obvious reason that it is very possible that some of these might not be removed when the school is open. In the event of a fire, a critical escape route could be blocked. Additionally, if a fire occurs while an intruder is in the building and his/her path of escape is blocked by a chained door, the principal could very well be liable.

Electronic security systems which are specifically designed as intrusion detection systems range from fairly simple to highly complex. The highly complex type is very sophisticated. It will sound an alarm in a central location, identify the specific location of the alarm, and activate a closed circuit television camera to record events taking place in the area where the alarm had sounded. Of course, this expensive high tech system exceeds the needs of most schools. At the other end of the spectrum are electronic systems involving simple magnetic contacts that sound an alarm when a door or window is opened; photoelectric beams which sound an alarm if an object breaks the beam; passive infrared used in conjunction with ultrasonic or microwave motion detectors; and audio systems that can detect the breaking of glass or other noise. Each of these devices or systems has its advantages and disadvantages; however, the advantages far outweigh the negatives. A well conceived and properly installed working alarm system

ceived and properly installed working alarm system can greatly reduce break-ins, vandalism and fire losses. The mere fact that a system has been installed often serves as a deterrent to potential violators and criminals as well as provide law enforcement the opportunity to respond quickly and apprehend intruders in the school.

However, it should be remembered that no alarm system is 100 percent reliable, and when a system is installed, procedures to deal with false alarms should be clearly established. Once it has been decided that an alarm system is needed in a school, advice should be sought from an independent consultant or security specialist on the type and the design of the system rather than relying on the distributor or manufacturer who is also motivated by his/her business interest. A number of sources are available in this regard. The Department of Public Instruction, School Planning has an educational consultant on the staff whose area of expertise is security and who is available to consult with LEAs on these matters. Other resources on advice concerning alarm systems include local law enforcement. School districts which have large industrial facilities, will find that these companies often have security consultants on their staff who would be willing to volunteer some of their time and expertise to the school in the design of an alarm system. Also school districts near military installations will find that there are security experts here who will share their expertise in assisting schools in the design of a system.

Finally, there are private security consultants who have no connection with the manufacturer or distributor of alarm systems. They can be hired to design the security system for a specific school or school district.

Lighting

Among security professionals there are two schools of thought concerning lighting. An unconventional lights out approach was begun in Reno, Nevada, and later adopted in Portland, Oregon, in 1981. The lights out program calls for turning all interior and exterior lights off when the school is secured for the night. Blinds, shades or other window cover-

ings are left open to provide a clear view into buildings by neighbors, police patrols or passers by. Darkness tends to enhance a feeling of vulnerability among intruders to the campus. In addition to a significant reduction in vandalism and crimes at the school, the districts where the lights out program was adopted realized considerable energy savings. The darkness program has several advantages: intruders require light to move around in unfamiliar buildings; any light used by intruders will become a beacon easily seen by anyone in the vicinity of the school. Vandals, in order to get satisfaction from their destructive acts, need light to admire their handiwork and darkness tends to inhibit social interaction between vandals. We leave lights on in our homes when we are away to create the appearance of someone being at home. In contrast schools are known to be empty at night so lighting them provides little benefit in terms of deception. Mr. Chuck Gaw, Chief of School Police in Reno, Nevada, said that the lights out program had been highly successful in his school system in reducing vandalism and theft. Mr. Gaw talked with a number of inmates serving time in prison for breaking and entering. They said that darkened buildings were foreboding and lighted buildings were much more attractive targets. According to Mr. Gaw, criminals are as afraid of the dark as anyone else. Other aspects of the security program in both Portland, Oregon and Reno, Nevada include a vandalism hot line. The hotline is a 24 -hour answering service that relays complaints from citizens to appropriate law enforcement agencies concerning suspicious activity reported around a school. Approximately once a year members of Mr. Gaw's department call on neighbors who live near or in sight of schools to explain the hotline program and asking for their help in reporting suspicious activity. Residents are given stickers with the hotline number that can be stuck on or near their telephone.

The other side of the lighting debate calls for well-illuminated grounds and buildings. If a school district opts for lighting, a few guidelines should be considered. Lights should be placed 12 to 14 feet above the ground, either wall-mounted or on standards. Standards should be either concrete or galvanized steel. Since most schools are patrolled from the exterior, lights should be directed at the facility. Sodium metal halide or mercury vapor lights are the most effective, and break resistant lenses are recommended. Situate lights in order to reduce shadows

without glare. Exterior lights that come on through a motion detector can be a very effective deterrent, especially when used in conjunction with a darkened building! They are inexpensive and easy to install.

Conclusion

John I. Goodlad said in his book, A Place Called School, "those who can and want to learn must be protected from those who don't." Vandalism and violence, whether directed at individuals or at school facilities, are threats to learning and the environment where learning takes place. The hope for this publication is that it will help local education authorities in their efforts to provide safe and secure schools.

Following is a general checklist which has been effective as a guide for self evaluations of school security. A local committee made up perhaps of a security person (if one is available), an assistant principal, maintenance chief, a teacher and chief custodian using this checklist to analyze security strengths and weaknesses can provide valuable recommendations on specific security/anti-vandalism actions. The vandalism/security consultant at School Planning is available to assist in such a security review upon request.

APPENDIX

Vandalism Prevention/Security Checklist

Organization

1. Is there policy for dealing with violence and vandalism? If so, does it address restitution or prosecution of perpetrators?

2. Is there an incident reporting system available to all the staff?

3. Is statistical information available concerning the scope of the problems at your school and in the community?

4. Has administration taken any preventive steps to anticipate problems?

5. Is there a good working relationship with local law enforcement?

6. Are both students and parents aware of expectations and school discipline codes?

7. Are there emergency procedures for bomb threats?

General Security Questions

1. Is a specific person responsible for overall security procedures?
2. Are school employees made aware of security procedures?
3. Are vandalism costs known?
4. Does law enforcement help and advise on vandalism prevention?
5. Are staff members and students encouraged to cooperate with the police?
6. Are local residents encouraged to report suspicious activity?
7. Is evening and weekend use of school facilities encouraged?
8. Are specific persons designated to secure buildings following after-hours activity?
9. Are school grounds patrolled after school hours?
10. Do students get actively involved in security efforts?
11. Have there been any security problems in the past?
12. Does the custodial staff work evenings and weekends?
13. Is there a visitor procedure?
14. Do students and/or employees have I.D. cards?
15. Are hallways and other gathering places for students supervised during and after school hours?
16. Whenever possible, is vandal damage repaired immediately?

Exterior Security

1. Are high-risk areas fenced?
2. Are gates properly secured with working locks?
3. Is the perimeter free of rocks and gravel?
4. Are vandal-proof signs posted concerning rules and enforcement?
5. Is there good visibility of parking areas?
6. Are all window ledges, roof accesses and other equipment that could be used for climbing or gaining entry properly secured?
7. Is the school designed with vandal-resistant walls?
8. Do the texture, color, etc., act to deter vandal activity?

1. Is there a key control system?

2. Are first floor windows properly secured?

3. Are protective screens or window guards used?

4. Have outside handles been removed from doors used primarily as exits?

5. Can any door locks be reached by breaking out glass?
   (No breakable glass should be within 40 inches of a panic bar.)

6. Are doors constructed properly, with pry-proof frames?

7. Are locks maintained and replaced when necessary?

8. Is the school sectioned off to limit access by evening users?

9. Are high-risk areas (shops, offices, etc.) sufficiently secured?

Interior Security

1. Is school property permanently and distinctly marked and serial numbers recorded?

2. Has an inventory been made recently?

3. Are school files locked in vandal-proof containers?

4. Is valuable equipment (PCs, typewriters, AV equipment) securely bolted down or locked up when not in use?

5. Is all money removed from cafeteria/bookstore cash registers after hours?

6. Have additional personal computers recently been purchased, or computer classrooms expanded? If so, have these been appropriately secured?

Intrusion Alarms

1. Does your school have an intrusion detection system?
2. Is it monitored on a 24-hour basis?
3. Do appropriate administrators understand the system's capabilities and limitations?
4. Do teachers and staff understand the basics of the system so as to prevent false alarms?
5. Is the number of false alarms kept to two or less for any six-month period?
6. Is there a clear procedure for alarm response?
7. Is there a policy for consistent maintenance and testing of the system?
8. Can selected areas of the school be "zoned" by the alarm system, indicating which area is being entered by an intruder?